

CHAPTER 3 (HOMO)SEXUAL IDENTITIES

In this chapter, I examine the different and, at times, contradictory discourses through which male same-sex desire is represented in Cernuda's last four books of poetry. Throughout the chapter, I show how Cernuda's later poetry draws on gender-separatist, gender-transitive, universalizing, and minoritizing understandings of sexual relations between men. In highlighting the coexistence of differing discourses of (homo)sexual definition in Cernuda's later poetry, I wish to problematize the unity of the category 'male homosexuality' as well as the description of the sexuality found in that poetry as 'homosexual'. Although I emphasize the limitations of this description, my intention is not to dispense with the category of male homosexuality altogether but to demonstrate more precisely the extent to which it is relevant to Cernuda's later poetry. Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of the minoritizing discourse of sexual identity in Cernuda's last four books of poetry is its applicability to a variety of forms of male same-sex desire, and it is this that requires us, for the sake of accuracy, to refer to the male homosexualities represented in them.

The main area of overlap between my argument in this chapter and the previous one is the concept of humanity. Rather than trying to reconcile my different readings of humanity, the difference between them should be understood as an indication of the conceptual gap between the spheres of sexuality and gender. At the same time, however, my analysis of male same-sex desire in this chapter acknowledges the mutual inflection of gender and sexuality which I suspended in chapter two in order to focus on the question of gender.

One of the main aims of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's argument in *Epistemology of the Closet* is to develop a conceptual framework to serve as an alternative to that provided by essentialist and constructionist understandings of male and female same-sex desire.¹ Instead of adjudicating between the essentialist and constructionist positions, Sedgwick concentrates on the two 'most active' (p. 1) contradictions in twentieth-century, Western understandings of homo- and hetero-sexual definition. The first of these contradictions is between the 'minoritizing' and 'universalizing' views. According to the former, homo- and hetero-sexual definition is mainly a matter of significance for a 'small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority', while, for the latter, such definition is an issue that determines the 'lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities' (p. 1). The second principal contradiction is between the 'gender-transitive' and the 'gender-

separatist' views, between those theories which understand same-sex desire in terms of a 'liminality or transitivity between genders' and those which see it as 'reflecting an impulse of separatism [...] within each gender' (pp. 1–2).

On the one hand, Sedgwick argues, since the nineteenth century, questions of sexual definition have been reduced to the gender of an individual's sexual object, a reduction which has been an integral part of the process of defining a minoritizing homosexual identity (pp. 8–9). On the other hand, Sedgwick states, there have 'persisted and developed' understandings of sexual object-choice which are 'less stable' and less concerned with identifying a sexual type (p. 9). According to these views, sexual object-choice is determined by factors which are not defined primarily in terms of gender and are, as a result, potentially common to all women and/or men. It is on these factors that universalizing understandings of sexual definition draw.

According to Sedgwick, both the gender-transitive and gender-separatist understandings of same-sex desire have existed since at least the turn of the century. In the first of these models, same-sex desire is understood through the lens of inversion, so that a man who desires another man is supposedly feminine and a woman who desires another woman supposedly masculine. As this suggests, this model of same-sex desire tends to maintain a distinction between identification and desire, that is, a man identifies as feminine yet desires another man. By contrast, in the gender-separatist model, desire and identification tend to be assimilated to one another so that it becomes the 'most natural thing in the world' for people of the same sex to 'bond together [...] on the axis of sexual desire' (p. 87). Whereas the gender-transitive model of same-sex desire locates its subjects between genders, the gender-separatist model places the man-loving man and woman-loving woman at the 'defining center' of their gender (p. 88). According to Sedgwick, the relation between gender and sexual identity allows for a variety of identifications as a result of which 'gender-separatist models [...] tend towards *universalizing* understandings of homo/heterosexual potential' while 'gender-integrative inversion or liminality models [...] tend toward *gay-separatist*, minoritizing models of specifically gay identity and politics' (p. 89). In other words, the gender-separatist model suggests that all men or women share the same homo/heterosexual potential, while the gender-transitive view makes possible an identification between gay men and lesbians on the grounds that their identities are located between genders.

One of Sedgwick's criticisms of the work of Michel Foucault and David M. Halperin is that it assumes that different discourses on homosexuality 'eclipse' rather than coexist with one another (pp. 46–47).² This, in Sedgwick's eyes, has the effect of classifying, for example, a discourse of acts in a contemporary social context as an 'anachronistic

vestige' (p. 47), a classification with damaging consequences. The importance of the fine-tuning that Sedgwick proposes stems from her belief that the most powerful results of modern sexual definition often arise from the 'inexplicitness or denial' of the differences that exist between coexisting and contradictory understandings of same-sex desire (p. 47). By presenting albeit different minoritizing understandings of homosexual identity as the only ones now in circulation, Sedgwick argues, Foucault and Halperin overlook the persistence of other discourses of sexual definition and, as a result, make it harder to resist, for example, the threat posed by a combination of sanctions against acts and persons.

In highlighting the coexistence of different understandings of (homo)sexual definition in Cernuda's later poetry, I am seeking not only to problematize what is understood by male homosexuality but also to generate a more nuanced view of Cernuda's representation of sexuality. In confirmation of Sedgwick's argument that discourses of sexual definition coexist with rather than eclipse one another, it is possible to find traces of minoritizing, universalizing, gender-separatist, and gender-transitive models of male same-sex desire in Cernuda's later poetry. The minoritizing bent of these poems takes the form of an avowal of particular forms of desire which are represented as characteristic of a circumscribed group of men and in which the maleness of the sexual partners is of paramount importance. The poems' universalizing tendency is found in the preference expressed in them for sex with one, human partner, for certain acts, bodily zones, and roles, for sex both between generations and within the same generation, for sex which only uses bodies, which takes place in public or in private, which is spontaneous and non-commercial, and which is sometimes orgasmic and sometimes not (or, at least, not explicitly so).³ Another aspect of these poems' universalizing spread is their use of sexual relations between men to focus or exemplify experiences and so on common to all human beings regardless of gender. This universalizing dimension of sexual definition makes a variety of sexual identities and identifications possible, including ones that cross gender boundaries. The gender-transitive dimension of the representation of male homosexuality takes, as expected, the form of an identification with femininity, while the gender-separatist model of male same-sex desire is revealed by a movement between descriptions of love between men and statements about all men.

Gender-separatist, universalizing, and minoritizing understandings of male same-sex desire all intersect in 'Amando en el tiempo' (p. 370) in which the male speaker describes experiencing the ageing of his beloved's body.⁴ Other men, he tells us, have had this experience in the past and will have it in the future (ll. 5-6). Although the lover describes his experience as a collective

male one (ll. 5–8), its collective character is paradoxical. On the one hand, it appears not to exist since each individual man must learn by himself about the feelings aroused by such an experience (ll. 9–11). The lover's experience is, apparently, unique and has nothing in common with that of other men. This is the strand of the 'tú's experience that Harris highlights when he cites lines nine to eleven to support his argument that the poem contains an 'injunction' to acknowledge Man's 'solitude' (p. 155). On the other hand, the lover can only comment on the past and make predictions about the future because, in fact, there are common features between his experience and other men's. This contradiction, according to which the speaker's experience is individual and universal, has its roots in the vicissitudes of one man's love for another. Male same-sex desire, therefore, furnishes an experience which is characteristic of masculinity in general and, as a result, of the homosexual lover's identity as a man. It is the movement between male homosexual identity and masculinity in general which testifies to a gender-separatist understanding of male same-sex desire and confirms Sedgwick's argument that gender-separatist representations of same-sex desire tend to promote universalizing understandings of sexual potential (p. 89).

However, is it accurate to describe the desire in this poem as same-sex, let alone as homosexual? Whereas homosexuality emerged late in the last century as a means of classifying individuals according to the gender of their sexual partners, the gender of the male lover's beloved in this poem is unclear: the lover refers to him/her using the non-gender-specific terms 'cuerpo' (ll. 1, 8, 16) and 'forma' (l. 7). Similarly, by itself, the reference to the beloved's 'gracia antigua' (l. 3) reveals nothing about their sex because, as Halperin has shown, in classical Athens, sexual partners were not distinguished by gender but by whether they played an active/dominant or passive/submissive role (p. 33). The beloved's 'gracia antigua', therefore, is linked not with their sex but with their sexual role. How, then, should we interpret the lover's sadness in this classical context? According to Halperin, women and 'boys' were two of the proper sexual objects for an adult, male citizen of Athens (p. 30). However, whereas a youth was only thought attractive to other males for the short period between the start of puberty and the 'arrival of the beard', women continued to be considered sexually attractive as they got older (p. 90). Consequently, in classical Athens, age was a more significant factor in sexual relations between male citizens and other men than it was in the former's sexual dealings with women. The lover's sadness at his beloved's ageing in 'Amando en el tiempo' can, therefore, be best understood in the context of classical Athenian pederasty and as indicating that his beloved is male.

This classical context has contradictory effects. On the one hand, it articulates sexual identity in terms of a preference for a particular distribution of roles (active/passive), for a partner of a certain age, and for a particular act (phallic penetration), all of which are unrelated in themselves to the gender of the sexual object and, as a result, point towards a universalizing understanding of sexual identity. The classical context, therefore, opens up a gap between 'Amando en el tiempo' and a minoritizing definition of male same-sex desire. Indeed, as Halperin has argued, the concepts of homo- and hetero-sexuality, or 'two differently structured psychosexual states [...] corresponding to the sameness or difference' of the sexual partners' gender, were alien to the classical Athenians (p. 33). As a result, any attempt to describe pederastic relations as homosexual is ultimately misleading. On the other hand, however, the male lover's sadness at his beloved's ageing is most readily intelligible in a context in which his partner is male. Together with the pederastic requirement that the active partner is also male, the lover's sadness means that his sexual identity is, in part, defined by the gender of his sexual object-choice, which brings us close to a minoritizing view of male same-sex desire. We can, therefore, justifiably describe as homosexual in a limited sense at least one of the forms of male same-sex desire found in Cernuda's later poetry. However, the specificity of the pederastic context is also an important reminder of the differences which should prevent pederasty from being equated with homosexuality.

A combination of universalizing, minoritizing, and gender-transitive discourses of male same-sex desire is found in the poem 'Elegía anticipada' (pp. 358–60).⁵ The poem begins with the evocation a cemetery (ll. 1–12) before describing the love affair which took place there between two men and whose links with gay culture have been examined by Allen (pp. 65–66). The affair's minoritizing dimension can be made out in the description of the love which smiled at the 'tú' as 'el amor único' (ll. 29–30) (that is, a specific form of love)⁶ and the masculine plural grammatical forms 'descuidados' (l. 37) and 'vosotros' (l. 47). Taken together, these two factors bestow masculinity on the body of the 'tú's lover which is described simply as a 'cuerpo amanecido [...] / Esbelto y rubio' (ll. 30, 31). Although this characterization of the beloved's body echoes that in other poems in which sexual relations between men take an at least partly pederastic form, the reciprocity of the men's pleasure in this poem (ll. 37–40) indicates that their identity cannot be described as pederastic with complete accuracy since, according to Halperin, the idea that sexual relations involved reciprocity between the partners was foreign to the classical Athenian understanding of all sexual relations, including pederastic ones (p. 30). Such reciprocity is also found in 'Versos para ti mismo' (p. 457), where the 'tú' is said to dream/remember the noble

shared effect (l. 6) that he enjoyed with a lover whose gender is left unclear, which places their pleasure in a universalizing frame.⁷

The gender-transitive representation of male same-sex desire is suggested in lines thirty-three to thirty-six, in which the divine figure who protects the space the men make love in is one which confuses binary notions of gender identity: the lovers have sex under the watchful eye of a male god whose sphere of influence is that of a woman, night, who is the day's female beloved. In a related vein, Silver understands the merging of identities as evidence that the 'whole cosmos became one' during the experience of love ('*Arcadia*', p. 113). A gender-transitive view of sexual relations between men is also evident in the description of the men's pleasure as the child of smiles and sighs (l. 40).

The love affair has various universalizing threads: its public setting (a cemetery); the spontaneity and randomness of the men's encounter, which are suggested by the description of the youthful partner as being blown in the wind (l. 31) and of their pleasure as the result of smiles and sighs; and the focusing of their pleasure on their lips (ll. 39–40). Similarly, in '*Despedida*' (pp. 533–34), the speaker's pleasure and desire focus on his lips (ll. 19–20) and, among other things, he longs to bathe in the sea with his now unattainable youthful male lovers (ll. 23–25), a gender specificity echoed in Olivio Jiménez's classification of the speaker's desire as homosexual ('*Desolación*', p. 331).⁸ In keeping with the universalizing dimension of love in '*Elegía anticipada*', the love affair is said to take place when an unspecified destiny was fullest (ll. 27–28) and, as other critics have noted (for example, Olivio Jiménez, '*Emoción*', pp. 135–36, and Harris, p. 128), the lovers are described as transcending human space (l. 47). Furthermore, in the poem's final lines (ll. 49–52), love between men gives rise to a comment on Man's wish to '*caer donde el amor fue suyo un día*' (l. 52). The universality of this wish is confirmed by the echo in it of a wish attributed to the male 'tú' in line sixteen when he was posited as representing the vague category of people who cannot fulfill their desires during their lifetime. The universality of the 'tú's' wish is indicated by these unrealized desires' lack of specificity, the fact that they could be anybody's desires for anything (l. 16). It is clear from this poem, therefore, that one man's desire for another man gives him access to a characteristic shared by all human beings. Consequently, and in keeping with Ruiz Silva's claim that '*Elegía anticipada*' describes '*una experiencia común*' of the sort that all humans have (p. 103), the poem's last line is addressed to anyone who has ever possessed love, including those men who recognize themselves in the minoritizing '*amor único*' (l. 29).

The poem '*In memoriam A. G.*' (pp. 454–55) displays the slippage between identification and desire which Sedgwick argued is characteristic of

gender-separatist views of homosexuality (p. 87).⁹ In the poem's opening stanza, we are told that the 'tú' was so taken up loving Gide's life that he forgot to think about his death (ll. 5–6), while, later, the speaker attributes to Gide the ability to restore the 'tú's 'aliento' (ll. 12–15). These two descriptions make it clear that an anaclitic relation exists between Gide and the 'tú': just as an infant's first sexual object 'derives from the person or persons who satisfy [its somatic] functions',¹⁰ Gide and his imagined presence are an object of the 'tú's love and the source for the satisfaction of his vital somatic functions (Gide restores the 'tú's 'aliento', his breath or, at least, his capacity to undertake physical tasks). At the same time, as Silver ('*Arcadia*', p. 169) and Jiménez-Fajardo (p. 121) among others have suggested, Gide functions as a model or object of identification for the 'tú': in the poem's last line, the speaker baldly states that there are few people left for the 'tú' to admire.

This gender-separatist view of male same-sex desire gives rise to a universalizing identification and sits alongside the traces of a minoritizing sexual identity. On the one hand, the speaker identifies with the homosexual 'tú' by referring to 'nosotros' (ll. 12, 18), while, on the other, there are moments when the speaker attributes an impermeable specificity to the 'tú's identity: two lines after referring to their shared lack of 'aliento' (l. 12), the speaker refers only to the 'tú' (l. 14) and then, immediately after mentioning their shared exploitation (l. 18), differentiates himself from the 'tú' by excluding himself from the exchanges between the 'tú' and those like him (ll. 18–21). The poem's final three lines also encapsulate the speaker's contradictory position: the speaker returns to the exploitation he shares with the 'tú' (ll. 21–22) yet, in the poem's closing line, distances himself from him by commenting on the scarcity of figures with whom he can now identify. The minority identity of the 'tú' is reinforced by the 'tú' and those like him (ll. 20–21) using the phrase 'nuestro mundo', which refers to the world of those belonging to the minority sexual grouping. However, the 'tú's words also transgress the boundary between his minority sexual identity and the speaker since the phrase 'este mundo' (l. 21) refers to the world they share. Its use by the 'tú', therefore, signals his identification with the speaker. The speaker's reciprocation of this identification is made clear both in his use of the pronoun 'nosotros' (as I have already suggested) and, as the poem's first three stanzas show (ll. 1–17), in his knowledge of what the 'tú' has lost with Gide's death. Contrary to the implication in lines twenty to twenty-one, the knowledge of what has died with Gide is not specific to the members of the sexual minority. This poem, therefore, is a further example of the capacity of gender-separatist representations of male same-sex desire to generate universal identifications.

The coexistence of various discourses of sexual definition in the poems I have analysed so far represents a profound challenge to the coherence of the two dominant categories of modern sexual definition, 'homosexuality' and 'heterosexuality'. The emphasis on sexual differentiation in Cernuda's later poetry also forces us to question the applicability to it of the adjective 'homosexual' and, at the same time, to talk of the male homosexualities represented in it. The same effects are also produced by other poems in which male same-sex desire is articulated by writing about men-loving men from history and myth. In the rest of this chapter, I shall analyse a number of these poems, some of which also testify to the difficulty and/or cost of such articulation in a hostile environment.

The poem 'Escultura inacabada (David-Apolo, de Miguel Ángel)' (pp. 424–26) is an attempt to preserve both the eternities embodied by the statue of David-Apollo and the love which created them (ll. 33–34) at a time when the former have been lost (ll. 27–28).¹¹ Refining Ruiz Silva's claim that that love is homosexual (p. 131), the desire at stake in this poem is more accurately described as pederastic and universal. The description of the statue as occupying the chronologically liminal position between childhood and youth (ll. 7–8) places it in the age bracket deemed appropriate for an object of pederastic desire. As a result, the statue can be seen as another example of the 'gracia antigua' attributed to the beloved in 'Amando en el tiempo' (l. 3), three of the components of which are beauty, harmony, and 'delicadeza'. Referring to the statue, the speaker tells the 'tú' to contemplate its beauty (l. 30), a beauty inextricable from its reconciliation of opposites (ll. 13–24), and, in an echo of the smooth forms denoted by 'delicadeza', describes the statue's penis as an unopened flower (l. 15) and its thighs as the arc of a lyre (l. 16). Nevertheless, the speaker also contradicts the specifically male conventions of pederasty by describing the love which moved Michelangelo to create the statue as 'la sola fuerza humana' (l. 34).

At the beginning of the poem (ll. 1–4), the speaker appears to confuse art and reality by describing the statue of David-Apollo as if it captured an event which had actually happened, whereas, of course, Michelangelo has simply represented the god as if he had been surprised in a private moment. Similarly, later in the poem, addressing the 'tú', the speaker treats the statue as if it were human by referring to its inevitable fall into time (ll. 25–26). (Other examples of this misrecognition are found elsewhere in the poem (ll. 17–24, 33–36).) The speaker's wish to preserve the statue from the ravages of time is based on his misrecognition of art as reality. In order to preserve the statue, the speaker instructs the 'tú' to be quiet (l. 25) and contemplate the statue's beauty (ll. 29–30) since, the speaker implies, if the statue were to hear the 'tú', it would wake up and lose its so-called eternities.

That there is, apparently, no danger of the speaker's words having the same effect presupposes their silence and, as a result, the specifically written, as opposed to spoken, character of the poem. The silence of the so-called speaker's address, therefore, points to poetry as a means of preserving both the statue's eternities and, implicitly, the desire which led to the statue's creation.

This optimism concerning the representability and preservability of male same-sex desire is reflected and modified in the poem 'El águila' (pp. 321–23), a retelling of the myth of Zeus's abduction of Ganymede.¹² As in 'Escultura inacabada', the speaker (Zeus) wishes to make the object of his desire (Ganymede) eternal and, in describing him, echoes the description of the object of pederastic desire in poems already discussed:

Tu edad estaba
 Florida de esa gala que los hombres
 Ostentan sólo un día, en los umbrales
 De juventud. [...]
 Y al mirarte pensaba en las futuras
 Áridas estaciones, despojando
 De armonía tu cuerpo liso y rubio.
 (ll. 35, 39)

Like Ganymede's body in these lines, the body of one of the partners in 'Elegía anticipada' was fair (l. 31), while the beloved's body was characterized by smoothness ('gracia') in 'Amando en el tiempo' (l. 3) and the statue of 'Escultura inacabada' was described not only as being between childhood and youth (ll. 7–8) but also as graceful (ll. 9–10).

Just as the lover in 'Amando en el tiempo' was troubled by his beloved's ageing and the speaker of 'Escultura inacabada' sought to preserve the eternities of David-Apolo's body, so, in 'El águila', the prospect of Ganymede's body losing its harmony (l. 43) moves Zeus to say that Ganymede must not die (l. 45) and that he wishes to make the beauty of Ganymede's body eternal (l. 57). However, Zeus contradicts himself on whether or not his objective is realizable. Initially, he describes beauty as a worldly embodiment of eternity but then compares it to an impossible redemption from death, an impossibility immediately underlined by the comparison of beauty's effects to those of the setting sun (ll. 45–52). Nevertheless, in a further twist to his argument, Zeus addresses Ganymede a few lines later and denies both the inevitability of death's destruction of beauty and the impossibility of making beauty eternal (ll. 57–61). The analogy between gods and poets (ll. 54–55) means that Zeus's difficulties are also the poet's and, as a result, points to the possibility of pederastic desire

being represented in poetry. However, the same analogy also testifies to the difficulty of such representation since Zeus seeks to preserve Ganymede as the object of his desire while portraying that goal as logically unrealizable.¹³

'*Birds in the Night*' (pp. 495–97), an account of Rimbaud and Verlaine's persecution and appropriation by the dominant culture, takes the difficulty adumbrated in 'El águila' to its extreme.¹⁴ The poem focuses on the two men's relationship and on the historical reception of their lives and work. Whereas, in 'El águila', logic appeared to prevent the representation of male same-sex desire, '*Birds in the Night*' testifies to the difficulty of acknowledging penetrative anal sex between men within a homophobic culture. The poem also makes clear the mutual inflection of questions of sexual identity and gender without, however, representing their only possible articulation. Whereas, in 'Escultura inacabada' and 'El águila', poetry was a medium through which male same-sex desire could be preserved and articulated, in '*Birds in the Night*' poetry perpetuates silence since the narrator is unable to sustain the sexuality of Rimbaud and Verlaine's relationship as an object of representation. Although '*Birds in the Night*' exemplifies, albeit for different reasons, the difficulty of representing male same-sex desire foreshadowed in 'El águila', the difference and similarity between pederasty and the in part sodomitic sexual identity represented in the former should not be overlooked.

The poem begins with the unveiling of a plaque by the French or English ambassador to mark the house in which Rimbaud and Verlaine lived during their stay in London in 1873 (ll. 1–5). The narrator represents the men's relationship in minoritizing terms by emphasizing the couple's difference: they are a 'rara pareja' (l. 3) and enjoy an 'amistad singular' (l. 15). However, this minority identity is combined with a universalizing discourse of acts given that the narrator refers to the couple's fornicating (l. 4), to Verlaine's imprisonment on account of his habits (ll. 24–26), and to the lovers' sodomy (l. 38).¹⁵ In keeping with such universalization, Rimbaud is characterized as a 'golfo' (l. 16), that is, according to María Moliner, a young man who is 'vicioso' or 'entregado con exceso a [...] placeres censurables'.¹⁶

From the beginning of the poem, these contradictory discourses of sexual definition are placed alongside references to alcohol and the men's status as poets (l. 4). A few lines later, Rimbaud's description as 'el golfo' is accompanied by that of Verlaine as 'el borracho' (ll. 15–16). All three factors reappear together when the narrator claims that their sodomy, drunkenness, and scorned verses are no longer an issue (ll. 37–39) and that details of their private lives are publicized without scandal or protest (ll. 41–42). In keeping with this, the narrator transcribes an imaginary dialogue between two men about the lovers in which Verlaine is described as

a lustful womanizer (ll. 43–44) and Rimbaud as a sincere Catholic (l. 45). However, this dialogue, in fact, gives the lie to the narrator's statement that the lovers' sexual acts are no longer an issue since it shows that, rather than a matter of indifference, the men's sexual acts are a matter for repression: Verlaine's sexual identity is reduced to heterosexuality and Rimbaud's sexuality is sublimated into religious belief. It is a sign of the disquiet generated in the imaginary interlocutors by sodomy that their description of Verlaine as heterosexual echoes the descriptions of him before and after his relationship with Rimbaud as married (l. 19) and spending his money on female prostitutes (ll. 32–33) respectively. However, even Verlaine's preference for commercial sex with women proves too disturbing for the male interlocutors who discard it in favour of a sexual identity determined solely by the gender of Verlaine's object-choice (ll. 43–44). Little wonder, then, that they describe him as normal and no different from them (ll. 44–45). Although this dialogue is part of the narrator's attack on the dominant culture, he also, as will become apparent, adopts the same repressive and censorial attitude to Rimbaud and Verlaine's sexual identities as the imaginary interlocutors.

The dominant culture is also disconcerted by the minoritizing dimension of Rimbaud and Verlaine's relationship, a dimension which Ramos Otero has also highlighted in his description of the poem as Cernuda's homage to, above all, male poets who loved other men (p. 29). The dominant culture's unease is apparent in the fact that, despite their opposing reactions to their persecution, both men are the object of the authorities' scrutiny even after their relationship has ended (ll. 30–35). Both men remain outlawed by officialdom despite, in the narrator's description, the absence of all sexual activity in Rimbaud's subsequent life and Verlaine's preference for female prostitutes (ll. 32–34). Given that Verlaine's preference for sex with female prostitutes does not exclude the possibility of penetrative anal sex, the disruptive status of his sexual identity appears to derive as much from his and Rimbaud's gender as from their preferred sexual acts. The representation of Rimbaud and Verlaine's relationship in universalizing and minoritizing terms, in terms of sodomy and male homosexual desire, is further testimony to the complexity of the male same-sex desire represented in Cernuda's last four books of poetry.

Despite his sharp criticism of Rimbaud and Verlaine's persecution and appropriation by the dominant culture, the narrator also occupies the same position as those he criticizes.¹⁷ On the one hand, he describes Verlaine and Rimbaud's reception as a 'farsa elogiosa repugnante' and expresses the wish that humanity were a cockroach so that he could squash it (ll. 54–56). However, misogyny is the price of the narrator's identification with the

lovers and of his attack on the reception of their lives and work (ll. 15–21). In these lines, the narrator gains access to the freedom he perceives to be embodied in penetrative anal sex between men by directing his hostility towards women, which neither López Castro (pp. 96–97) nor Pato (p. 96) comment on in their discussions of the third stanza. On the other hand, the narrator is implicitly the object of his own repugnance since one of the traits of the two lovers' reception is the attribution of good characteristics to them: it is a '*farsa elogiosa*' (l. 54; my emphasis). The narrator himself makes such an attribution by, for example, describing Rimbaud and Verlaine's relationship as an '*amistad singular*' (l. 15). The narrator's status as a target of his own disgust is also evident in the sarcasm of his reference to '*nuestro mundo y su progreso renombrado*' (l. 28). In keeping with his identification with those he also criticizes, the narrator describes Rimbaud as '*el golfo*' (l. 16), a description whose censorial consequences are enacted in the imaginary interlocutors' sublimation of Rimbaud's sexual identity. Furthermore, at the end of the poem, the narrator expunges all mention of sodomy (and alcohol) from his representation of Verlaine and Rimbaud and reduces them to poets (l. 52).

The poem '*Apologia pro vita sua*' (pp. 344–49) articulates another form of desire between men and offers a different perspective on the relation between gender and sexuality to that in '*Birds in the Night*'.¹⁸ As Gastón Baquero has noted, the poem's title is borrowed from the spiritual autobiography published in 1864 by John Henry Newman.¹⁹ Whereas Newman gave an account of his spiritual life, the speaker in '*Apologia pro vita sua*' spends the first sixty lines of the poem (just under half the poem) remembering his male lovers and his refusal to renounce his desire for other men. In the remainder of the poem, he reflects on and seeks to reconcile himself to his imminent death without ceasing to avow his sexuality. There is also an ambivalence in the speaker's attitude to his sexual identity, which testifies to the difficulty of reconciling male same-sex desire with God.

In the 1830s, Newman founded the Oxford Movement, a religious movement which sought to 'revive in the established church the traditions of the "ancient and undivided Church" in doctrine, liturgy, and devotion'.²⁰ According to Hilliard, one of the unusual features of the early Oxford Movement was the importance it attached to celibacy and, as a result, the founding of 'religious brotherhoods' (p. 185), a feature which, Hilliard suggests, may have provided an attractive alternative to marriage for men who were troubled by and unable to acknowledge publicly their desire for other men. Writing in 1895, James Rigg, a Wesleyan historian of the Oxford Movement, hinted strongly at this homosexual motivation by placing great emphasis on Newman's "'characteristically feminine'" mind and temperament

and the 'lack of virility of most of his disciples' (p. 185). Significantly, Charles Kingsley, one of Newman's opponents and the author of the article which prompted him to pen his *Apologia*, was an 'enthusiastic exponent of the duty of Christian "manliness", which he defined as courage, heartiness, physical vitality, and the procreation of children within marriage', and 'abhorred' the idea of celibacy as 'contrary to nature and a sin against God' (p. 188). Following Kingsley's attack on Newman, the 'charge of effeminacy—the usual nineteenth-century caricature of male homosexuality—stuck' (p. 188) to the Oxford Movement's successors. What is most relevant here for my argument is the representation of male same-sex desire as effeminate or, in Sedgwick's terms, as an example of gender-transitivity. In borrowing his title from Newman, therefore, the speaker of '*Apologia pro vita sua*' implicitly identifies with such a representation of male same-sex desire.

As well as further traces of a gender-transitive identity, '*Apologia pro vita sua*' also contains strands of other discourses of sexual definition. Looking back on the activities of his senses (including, oddly but significantly, his back), the speaker recalls, among others, the desire to possess beauty (ll. 110–11), smelling and kissing bodies (ll. 113–15), and having orgasms (l. 117). The importance of beauty in the articulation of pederastic desire in Cernuda's later poetry is clear from the descriptions of the beloved in, for example, 'Amando en el tiempo' and 'El águila'. This link with pederasty comes under pressure, however, in the description of the speaker's so-called sixth sense, his back, as an 'árbol trémulo del espasmo' (l. 117). This description certainly suggests the speaker's pleasure in penetrative anal sex and, as a result, is a possible further indicator of pederastic desire. However, the description does not make it clear whether the speaker's preference is to penetrate or to be penetrated and the poem as a whole makes it possible to assign both preferences to him. On the one hand, the echoes of pederasty indicate his preference for the role of penetrator. On the other, the analogy between his love and a house (ll. 1–15, especially ll. 2–5) has connotations of receptivity and, as a result, suggests his pleasure in being penetrated. Similarly, a little later in the poem, the speaker compares the succession of his lovers to that of kings (ll. 31–38) and refers to his lovers' 'pasión dominadora' (l. 38). According to Halperin, the conventions governing classical Athenian sexual relations, including pederastic ones, understood sexual roles in terms of domination and submission and considered them 'isomorphic' with the partners' respective social status (p. 30). As a result, an adult male citizen was only permitted to have sex with his social and political inferiors, who included youths. Given that the older man in a pederastic relation was, as a consequence, also the active and dominant partner, the

speaker's desire in '*Apologia pro vita sua*' exceeds a pederastic frame. To the same effect, the speaker's object of desire in '*Escultura inacabada*' is a representation of a social superior, the statue of a god-king. The traditional association of receptivity or passivity with femininity means that the speaker's pleasure in being penetrated is another indication of a gender-transitive understanding of his sexual identity.

By articulating his identity in such terms, the speaker establishes a similarity between himself and the so-called feminine men of the Oxford Movement, who are evoked by the friends (l. 46) that invite him to join their brotherhood (ll. 48–59). Although the men who make up this cosy and comfortable brotherhood are differentiated from the speaker by their renunciation of passion (ll. 58–59), their shared identification with femininity suggests that sexual identity exceeds a minoritizing framework based on object-choice. To the extent that he avows his sexual identity, the speaker makes good the historical silence or renunciation of the Oxford Movement's celibate brethren.

Another form that this universalizing strategy takes is the speaker's framing of his sexual identity as a matter of human relevance. For instance, immediately after complaining that his first lover's passion was not matched by that of any of his subsequent lovers, the speaker asks rhetorically whether passion is not the measure of human greatness (l. 39). Similarly, later in the poem, during his monologue with God, the speaker moves between referring to his sexual identity and making statements about humanity (ll. 91–98, 101–07). A third way in which the speaker universalizes his sexual identity is by relating it to the pleasures of smelling and kissing bodies and having orgasms (ll. 113–15, 117).²¹ However, the first two of these pleasures also introduce a minoritizing dimension into the poem since they echo the kisses the male lovers exchanged in '*Elegía anticipada*' (ll. 38–40) and '*Despedida*' (ll. 19–20) and the comparison of a young man's body to the smell of a flower in '*El perfume*' (pp. 411–12; ll. 13–23).²²

In contrast with the men of the Oxford Movement who renounced their sexual desire in favour of celibacy, the speaker in '*Apologia pro vita sua*' actively avowed his sexuality and, as a result, did not join the brotherhood (l. 58). However, interwoven with the speaker's avowal, there is now, on his deathbed, an ambivalence which causes him to resemble the men of the Oxford Movement. For example, in his reflections on his first affair with a man known as Archangel (l. 22), the speaker eventually (but tentatively) decides that he loved him (ll. 27–30) before immediately qualifying his decision by saying that '*mas eso ya no importa*' (l. 30), a qualification which echoes the statement made six lines earlier that '*perdón es ahora lo único que importa*' (l. 24). The speaker, therefore, is making two gestures at once: he

remembers/articulates his sexual identity and suspends its relevance. The same double gesture can also be seen in the poem's penultimate stanza (ll. 106–20), which begins with the speaker appearing to propose a reconciliation between his sexual identity and forgiveness (ll. 106–10) and remembering the physical pleasures he enjoyed during his lifetime (ll. 110–17). However, by ending the stanza with the statement that his memory has emptied of memories (l. 120), the speaker implicitly abandons his sexual identity and, therefore, signals the failure of his attempt at reconciliation.

Although the speaker ostensibly seeks forgiveness from God for not having believed in Him (ll. 93–94) rather than for having avowed his sexual identity, his non-belief and sexuality are inextricable since the example of belief which the poem offers, the celibate brotherhood, is based on the repression of a gender-transitive sexual identity. Unlike the members of the brotherhood, however, the speaker renounces his passions in favour of a God who he struggles to believe in, a situation that bears out Ruiz Silva's reference to the poem's 'contradictoria vena religiosa' (p. 103). For example, having described himself in the present as easy prey (l. 95) for God's ministers, who forgive or condemn Man's actions, the speaker questions the authority of those same ministers (ll. 97–98). More pointedly still, in the last stanza, the speaker uses two conditional clauses to qualify both his plea that God not destroy his soul (l. 126) and his anticipation of eternal life (ll. 131–32). The repetition of the poem's first line in its last line (l. 135) suggests that the speaker's situation is insoluble, that, ultimately, in his eyes, there is no alternative to avowing and renouncing his sexual identity in exchange for a doubtful salvation.²³

In 'Luis de Baviera escucha *Lohengrin*' (pp. 513–17), the sexual identity of King Ludwig is articulated through a variety of discourses and is represented as sustainable in a way that that of the speaker in '*Apologia pro vita sua*' was not.²⁴ Nevertheless, as will become apparent, the King is forced to pay a high price for his avowal of male same-sex desire. The poem moves between descriptions of King Ludwig and his reactions to a performance of Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*, descriptions of his relations with his ministers, and descriptions of his future. Central to all these descriptions is the King's identity: he discovers who he is by watching *Lohengrin*, his relations with his ministers are conflictive because he is unable to be himself and a king at the same time, and his future holds the fulfilment of his identity, including his metaphorical abdication of royal power.

According to the narrator, King Ludwig's dreams represent his true identity. This is clear in, for example, the statements that his true kingdom consists of dreams and solitude (ll. 43–45) and that the shadows of his

dreams were the truth of his life (l. 98). These dreams are condensed in the operatic character of Lohengrin who, the narrator writes, is (also) the King (ll. 55–57). In the same vein, at the end of the poem, the narrator describes King Ludwig as embodying the myth of Lohengrin (l. 105) and states that the music of the opera helps the King to know and fall in love with himself (ll. 107–08). Consequently, the description of Lohengrin as a fair-skinned, blond, beautiful male youth of pure, untouchable grace (ll. 56, 102) should also be understood as a description of the King. (Although the King is described as having black hair (l. 13), the narrator's comparison of him to a 'dios nimbado' (l. 101) makes it possible to imagine him as a blond.) Given that the myth of Lohengrin embodies King Ludwig's identity and that, as a result, the King is immortalized in the music (l. 108), the King's sexual identity is both more readily representable and more sustainable than that of the speaker in '*Apologia pro vita sua*'.²⁵

As the description of Lohengrin makes clear, King Ludwig has many qualities in common with the pederastic objects of desire I have already analysed in other poems. However, these pederastic parallels are subverted by three elements of the description of the King's love affairs. Firstly, the references to 'la presencia humana' (l. 46) and 'la humana hermosura' (l. 54) add a universalizing dimension to the King's sexual identity. Similarly, in 'Dostoevski y la hermosura física' (p. 493), the pederastic echoes set up by the description of the male youth, Falalei, are distorted because Falalei also exemplifies the universalizing and implicitly ungendered beauty of the title.²⁶ Secondly, instead of occupying the dominant position as pederastic convention would require, King Ludwig identifies with the role of the submissive partner (ll. 46–47, 50–54) or, as Jiménez-Fajardo states, becomes the 'slave' of 'youth and beauty' (p. 137). In keeping with this identification, the narrator states that, in gaining his identity through loving Lohengrin, the King occupies the same position as the character of Elsa in Wagner's opera, who loves Lohengrin without knowing who he is (l. 72). In the King's case, Elsa's ignorance translates into the confusion of his identity with Lohengrin's. Therefore, the King desires another man as if he himself were a woman and, in doing so, knows himself. However, this raises the question of how King Ludwig, who loves Lohengrin by identifying with Elsa, can know himself by loving a man who loves a woman (Elsa). The homosexual King can only recognize himself in the heterosexual Lohengrin and posit Lohengrin as the embodiment of his identity if Lohengrin's identity is gender-transitive and not determined by object-choice. Otherwise, the King's relation with Lohengrin would lead to him losing, rather than discovering, his identity. The third factor that disrupts the parallels between the King's desire and pederasty is the similarity of age between the young

King and his sexual partners (ll. 50, 52). Similarly, in 'El perfume', the description of the older male 'tú's desire as unchanged by his age (ll. 28–29) implies that it is not stimulated by the age difference between himself and his male partner. By the same token, however, such desire can also quite readily accommodate a difference in age as is shown by the fact that his desire in this instance is stimulated by a younger man. This is also the case in 'Cara joven' (pp. 414–15) in which the older man's pleasure in looking at the young face of the title is the same as always (ll. 7–8), as Harris has also noted (p. 138).²⁷ However, in 'Cara joven', the older man's pleasure is potentially universal since the younger individual's gender is not specified.

In an echo of the speaker's identity in '*Apologia pro vita sua*', the King's identity, as I have shown, is founded on an identification with femininity which exceeds the boundaries determined by object choice. Whereas the speaker in that poem was torn between avowal and repression, King Ludwig is able to affirm his sexual identity, albeit at the price of political marginalization (l. 96), a consequence that is simultaneous with the fulfilment of his destiny to desire himself (l. 94). Such a destiny is an instance of a minoritizing discourse of narcissistic object-choice since it is prefigured in the King's love for Lohengrin which not only involves object-choice but also helps him to know and fall in love with himself (l. 108).²⁸ The King, therefore, fulfills his destiny by desiring himself in other men.

In their articulation of male same-sex desire, the poems by Cernuda which I have discussed in this chapter frequently display an acute awareness of the difficulty of articulating that desire and of the price to be paid for its avowal. At the same time, they also offer a tapestry of male same-sex desire which includes a variety of homosexual identities and pushes beyond minoritizing terms in an attempt to disrupt and reorganize the dominant categories of sexual definition. As a consequence, Cernuda's last four books of poetry oblige us to refine our critical discussions of male same-sex desire to begin to do justice to the (homo)sexualities portrayed in them.

NOTES

1. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994).
2. Sedgwick's criticism is aimed at Halperin's 'Introduction', in David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 1–12 (pp. 8–9); and at Foucault's account of the emergence of homosexuality in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1979; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 43.
3. I have derived this list of universalizing sexual characteristics from Sedgwick, pp. 8, 31, 34–35.

4. For other readings of this poem, see Olivio Jiménez, 'Emoción', p. 123; Harris, pp. 151, 155; and José Ángel Valente, 'Luis Cernuda y la poesía de la meditación', in *Luis Cernuda*, ed. by Derek Harris, pp. 303–13 (p. 310).
5. For other readings of this poem, see Silver, 'Arcadia', pp. 113–14, 149–50, 193; Harris, pp. 127–28; Valente, p. 310; Kevin J. Bruton, 'The Cemetery Poems of Luis Cernuda', *ALEC*, 13 (1988), 189–208 (pp. 194–96, 201–04); and Pato, pp. 73–74.
6. Bruton has described this love as, in part, homosexual ('Cemetery Poems', pp. 195, 196).
7. The importance of nobility in love is also mentioned in 'Antes de irse' (p. 495), in which the world's lack of virtue is simultaneous with the frustration of the speaker's love. For another reading of 'Versos para ti mismo', see Harris, p. 136. For other readings of 'Antes de irse', see Harris, pp. 166, 170; Jiménez-Fajardo, p. 148; and Villena, p. 43.
8. For other readings of 'Despedida', see Harris, pp. 166, 170; Olivio Jiménez, 'Desolación', p. 331; Ruiz Silva, pp. 172–73; and Villena, pp. 48–49, 54–55.
9. For other readings of this poem, see Silver 'Arcadia', p. 169; Jiménez-Fajardo, pp. 120–21; and López Castro, p. 92. The 'tú's reaction to Gide's death in this poem is close to that attributed to E. M. Forster by J. R. Ackerley who states that Forster "wept to hear of the death of André Gide, not for personal reasons, he knew him only slightly, but because he felt that one of the great props of his own civilization had been withdrawn" (J. R. Ackerley, *E. M. Forster: A Portrait* (London: Ian McKelvie, 1970), p. 19; quoted in Jeffrey Meyers, *Homosexuality and Literature, 1890–1930* (London: The Athlone Press, 1977), p. 14).
10. Richard Wollheim, *Freud* (London: Fontana, 1973; repr. 1987), p. 117.
11. For other readings of this poem, see Silver, 'Arcadia', pp. 75–76; Harris, p. 138; Ruiz Silva, pp. 129–30, 130–31; and Sahuquillo, pp. 115, 346.
12. For other readings of this poem, see Olivio Jiménez, 'Emoción', pp. 123, 135–36; Silver, 'Arcadia', pp. 36–39; Otero, 'Tercera salida', p. 160; Harris, pp. 71, 99–100; Summerhill, pp. 147–50; and Sahuquillo, p. 341.
13. For other discussions of the Zeus–poet analogy, see Silver, 'Arcadia', pp. 36–39; and Harris, pp. 99–100.
14. For other readings of this poem, see Silver, 'Arcadia', p. 169; Harris, pp. 168, 173; Villena, pp. 46, 47, 52; Pato, pp. 93–103; LaFollette Miller, pp. 174–78; and Sahuquillo, pp. 302, 367–68.
15. LaFollette Miller echoes this universalizing perspective when she quotes line four to support her argument that Rimbaud and Verlaine lived 'like Everyman' during their time in London (p. 175). Pato argues that the narrator's use of the noun 'sodomía' (l. 38) is part of his imitation of society's condemnation of Rimbaud and Verlaine (p. 96).
16. *Diccionario de uso del español*, 2 vols (Madrid: Gredos, 1990), I, pp. 1404–05, II, p. 1522.
17. To similar effect, LaFollette Miller has drawn a parallel between Cernuda's poem and the plaque commemorating the poets and has argued that Cernuda positions himself as one of the readers and critics referred to in the poem (pp. 177, 178).
18. For other readings of this poem, see Harris, pp. 82, 85, 131–32, 152; Maristany, 'La poesía', p. 200; Bruton, 'Exile Poetry', p. 393; Pato, pp. 58, 66, 71–74; and Summerhill, pp. 150–51.
19. Gastón Baquero, 'La poesía de Luis Cernuda', in *Darío, Cernuda y otros temas poéticos*, (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1969), pp. 149–90 (p. 182). John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua* (London: Collins, 1962). According to Bruton, this poem mirrors Coleridge's poem of the same title ('Exile Poetry', p. 393).
20. David Hilliard, 'Unenglish and Unmanly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality', *Victorian Studies*, 25 (1982), 181–210 (p. 184).

21. A preference for orgasmic sex is one of the factors that Sedgwick includes in her list of sexually differentiating factors that are potentially disruptive of dominant understandings of sexual identity (p. 35).
22. For another reading of 'El perfume', see Harris, p. 136.
23. For a different reading of this last line, see Pato, pp. 71–74.
24. For other readings of this poem, see Harris, pp. 171–72; Paz, pp. 158–59; Jiménez-Fajardo, pp. 136–38; Villena, pp. 46–48, 55; Ulacia, pp. 68–72; and Wilcox, pp. 181–204.
25. For another reading of line 108, see Wilcox, pp. 189–201.
26. For other readings of this poem, see Olivio Jiménez, 'Desolación', pp. 330–31; Jiménez-Fajardo, pp. 139–40; Ruiz Silva, pp. 177–78; and Villena, p. 46.
27. For another reading of 'Cara joven', see Harris, p. 138.
28. For other readings of narcissism in this poem, see Harris, pp. 171–72; and Jiménez-Fajardo, pp. 136–38. Harris (p. 171) and Ulacia (p. 71) also mention homosexuality in relation to this poem.